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POSSIBLE SITUATIONS ARISING FROM KOREAN PRISONER ISSUE ON 23 JANUARY

Assumptions: That there is no change in the UN Command's position that the 22,000 Chinese and North Korean anti-Communist prisoners must assume civilian status and hence be released from custody on 23 January; and that there is no change in the Communist stand that the prisoners must be held in custody until the Korean political conference discusses their disposition.

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Possibility of a delay in the release:

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after consultation with Nehru, told that India is planning to return the prisoners to the original detaining sides if no other disposition has been agreed on prior to 23 January. General Thimayya, Chairman of the WHRC, has publicly confirmed this intention. Menon, Indian delegate to the UN, however, is attempting to reconvene the UNGA to discuss the question and India has denied responsibility for Thimayya's statement. It is possible, therefore, that not only the prisoner issue, but the Korean political conference as well, might again be brought up for discussion at the UN, thus delaying the planned release. It is also possible that India, because of the Pakistan arms issue or other reasons, will change its present position favoring the prisoners' release.

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Possible situations in event of the prisoners' release:

Action by the Communists: It is unlikely that the Communists will resort to armed action since (1) entry into the demilitarized zone of regular or irregular troops would be violation of the armistice agreement and entails the risk of renewed war; (2) they probably do not actually want the prisoners back; (3) they probably want the prisoner issue disposed of prior to the holding of a political conference to avoid another psychological defeat; and (4) the situation presents them with a face-saving solution and an opportunity to accuse the US of violating the armistice terms.

Possible Communist propaganda courses if prisoners are released:

A threat that the release of the prisoners would lead to a resumption of hostilities is unlikely, since there is no indication that the Communists are preparing for this course of action. Propaganda could take the form of a last-minute appeal or threat to the POW's, but in view of the probability that the Communists do not actually want the prisoners back, these courses appear unlikely.

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A more probable course would be a final world-wide propaganda blast at the US and Rhee, and possibly at the Indians charging terrorism, etc. Because release of the prisoners would represent a defeat for the Communists, it is possible that they might attempt to divert world attention from the Korean issue by creating a spectacular event somewhere else in the world.

Action by Rhee: No action is contemplated by Rhee, except to demand a prompt turnover of the prisoners by the UNC, to demand a prompt departure of the Indian troops, and possibly to oppose their removal by bus and train as presently contemplated.

Having obtained the release of the prisoners, however, one important deterrent to taking unilateral military action is removed.

Action by the prisoners: Since the prisoners recognize they will be dependent upon the UNC and the ROK for initial support, the transfer of custody to the UNC at some point along the southern boundary will probably be orderly.

There is some possibility of an attack by 22,000 anti-Communist prisoners upon the 350 pro-Communist prisoners, especially if the latter are not released first. In this connection, the pro-Communists may refuse to leave the compound since, in the Communist view, it would violate the armistice.

There is some possibility of disorder following the release because of the possible presence of some prisoners desiring repatriation to the north among the anti-Communist group. Thimayya estimates these may number 1,500-2,000.

Possible situations in event of non-release:

Action by the Communists: Since the Communists favor this course, no action is contemplated, even in the event Rhee attempts to use force against the Indian troops. Responsibility to repel any such move by Rhee, rests with the UN Command.

Action by Rhee: Reports indicate that the South Korean Provost Marshal General is maintaining contacts with the prisoners by agents and radio broadcasts. It is probable that Rhee will order a mass breakout if a prolonged detention is indicated.

Rhee is already threatening action against the Indian custodial forces, but may find it difficult to implement this. The only ROK forces in the area of POW site is the 2nd Korean Marine

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Regiment (minus), which is attached to the 1st US Marine Division. Measures have been taken to prevent this force from moving into the zone. So far as is known, there are no South Korean police or security units in the area.

Rhee will consider retention of the prisoners a violation of the armistice, which automatically justifies a renewal of the war. He has indicated that he is freed from his obligations to the US on 27 January. He also continues to assert that he will order a march northward.

Rhee's unpredictability, his emotionalism and rapid shifts in attitude, his probable conviction that the US cannot abandon Korea, his stated belief that a suicidal attack would be better than "slow strangulation," all point to the possibility that he might carry out his threat of unilateral action.

No military preparations for such action have been noted, except that the recent establishment of a Joint Chiefs of Staff would facilitate such action. The most likely possibility is that Rhee will not undertake such action unless he sees the possibility of involving the US; since he probably has no illusions regarding US determination not to come to his assistance, he may create front-line incidents in an attempt to provoke the Communists into attacking first. Statements attributed to Foreign Minister Pyun and ex-Prime Minister Yi Pom-sok support this estimate.

Action by the prisoners: Since the anti-Communist prisoners have been informed of the UN timetable, and are expecting their release on or about 23 January, any prolonged detention is almost certain to cause rioting and attacks upon the Indian troops.

Unless there is some prospect for release, an attempt at a mass breakout seems inevitable, with or without instructions from Rhee. Advance preparations by South Korean authorities for their absorption into the South Korean community can be expected.

The prisoners on both sides who are considered unreliable may be killed. Some pro-Communists among the unrepatriated anti-Communists will probably attempt to join guerrilla forces operating in the South, or operate as agents.